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# Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, MY
SUBJ: KELANTAN STATE ELECTION RESULTS

REF : KUALA LUMPUR 2054

1. SUMMARY. THE NATIONAL FRONT, TOGETHER WITH THE BERJASA PARTY, SCORED A LANDSLIDE VICTORY IN KELANTAN STATE ELECTIONS MARCH 11. MANY OBSERVERS AND JOURNALISTS, TILL THE END, HAD TIPPED THE ISLAMIC PARTY, PAS, AS THE FAVORITE, AND INDEED RESULTS WERE BEYOND EXPECTATIONS OF EVEN THE TWO VICTORIOUS PARTIES. HOWEVER, HOW MUCH OF THE VOTE WAS SIMPLY A PROTEST AGAINST PAS IS STILL UNCERTAIN. REGARDLESS, THE NATIONAL FRONT WILL PROBABLY TRY TO MAINTAIN ITS MOMEMNTUM BY HOLDING GENERAL ELECTIONS WITHIN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. END SUMMARY.

2. KELANTAN VOTERS IN A SPECIAL STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTION MARCH 11 GAVE RESOUNDING VICTORIES TO CANDIDATES OF NATIONAL FRONT (IN THIS CASE UMNO) AND BERJASA (FLEDGLING ISLAMIC PARTY), TURNING THEIR BACK ALMOST TOTALLY ON PAS, WHICH HAD RULED THE STATE FOR PAST 15 YEARS. BERJASA EARLIER ANNOUNCED PLANS TO JOIN NATIONAL FRONT (NF). BREAKDOWN OF SEATS IS 23 NF, 11 BERJASE, 2 PAS. PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN, 37 PERCENT NF, 27 PERCENT BERJASA, 32 PERCENT PASM EX-FEDERAL MINISTER OF PUBLIC ENTERPRISES DATUK HAJI MOHAMED YAACOB IS SLATED TO BE THE NEW CHIEF MINISTER.
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3. RESULTS ARE SIGNIFICANT IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:

A. RULING NATIONAL FRONT GIVEN TREMENDOUS BOOST IT DESIRED TO FACE UPCOMING GENERAL ELECTIONS, WHICH OBSERVERS FEEL MAY BE HELD SOON IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THIS MOMENTUM. VICTORY SEEN BY UMNO AS CONFIRMATION OF PEOPLE'S FAITH IN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

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PROMISES OF DEVELOPMENT FOR BACKWARD STATE, AND BANKRUPTCY OF PAS PLATFOMR AND LEADERSHIP.

B. NF VICTORY OF SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE TO KELANTAN NF CHAIRMAN AND FINANCE MINISTER TENGKU RAZALEIGH HAMZAH, WHO HAD STAKED CAREER ON FEDERAL GOVERNMENT POLICY DURING AND AFTER KELANTAN POLITICAL CRISIS OF OCTOBER 1977. RAZALEIGH NOW HAS FIRM BASE OF SUPPORT--A PREREQUISITE FOR SOMEONE WITH THE HIGH POLITICAL AMBITIONS HE REPORTEDLY HARBORS.

C. KELANTAN CHIEF MINISTER MOHAMED NASIR SHOWN TO BE GENUINELY POPULAR LEADER. HIS OWN VICTORY MARGIN, ON BERJASA TICKET, LARGEST OF ANY CANDIDATE. MOST OBSERVERS FEEL BERJASA DID WELL BECAUSE OF ITS ASSOCIATION WITH HIM.

D. BERJASA DID SURPRISINGLY WELL FOR NEW PARTY, WINNING 10 OF 11 STRAIGHT FIGHTS WITH PAS, BUT DID POORLY IN 3-OR 4-CORNEERED FIGHTS, SHOWING IT IS PREFERRRED ABOVE PAS, BUT TAKES SECOND PLACE TO NATIONAL FRONT.

E. DESPITE FACT PAS FIELDED MANY NEW FACES, ELECTORATE OVER-WHELMINGLY REJECTED IT. THE TWO PAS VICTORIES WERE WITH MARGINS OF LESS THAN 100 VOTES. IN PAS PRESIDENT ASRI'S OWN CONSTITUENCY, ALL 3 PAS CANDIDATES SUFFERED RESOUNDING DEFEATS, CAUSING SPECU-LATION THAT ASRI HIMSELF MAY NOT RUN AGAIN FOR PARLIAMENT FROM THAT DISTRICT. MANY EXPECT A POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN PAS FOR TOP
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LEADERSHIP POSITIONS AFTER ITS DISASTROUS LOSS IN ITS HOME STATE.

F. OBSERVERS HERE ARE UNCERTAIN WHETHER RESULTS INDICATE SUPPORT FOR NF--BERJASA, OR REJECTION OF PAS AND ABUSES IT REPORTEDLY COMMITED IN NAME OF ISLAM.

4. WE ARE UNAWARE OF ANY FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES FIGURING IN THE KELANTAN CAMPAIGN. NONETHELESS PAS IN THE PAST HAS SYMPATHIZED WITH, IF NOT ACTIVELY SUPPORTED, THAI MUSLIM SEPARATISTS. NOW THAT KELANTAN IS FIRMLY IN THE NATIONAL FRONT CAMP, AND WITH UMNO IN A PREDOMINANT POSITION, THIS IRRITANT IN THAI-MALAYSIAN RELATIONS SHOULD BE MORE EASILY CONTAINABLE ALTHOUGH PRO-THAI MUSLIM SENTIMENT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY REMAIN WIDESPREAD IN KELANTAN DUE TO EXTENSIVE FAMILY CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE BORDER.

5. TAKEN AT FACE VALUE, THE RESULTS VINDICATE THE CENTRAL GOVERN-MENT'S MODERNIST AND SOMEWHAT MORE SECULAR BRAND OF MULTI-RACIAL COALITION POLITICS AND REBUFF THE MORE NARROW, OFTEN OBSCURANTIST FROM OF POLITICS PRACTISED BY THE ISLAMIC PARTY. ALTHOUGH SOME ASPECTS OF THE KELANTAN ELECTION EXPERIENCE ARE APPLICABLE TO OTHER STATES, PARTICULARLY WHERE PAS IS LIKELY TO BE A MAJOR CHALLENGER (KEDAH, PERLIS, TRENGGANU AND PERAK),

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THE NF WILL HAVE TO ACCOMMODATE ITS CAMPAIGN STRATEGY AND TACTICS TO THE FACT THAT ELSEWHERE IT IS ALREADY THE GOVERNING PARTY, AND LIKELY TO FACE CHALLENGES FROM THE NON-MALAY LEFT AS WELL AS FROM THE MALAY RIGHT. ALTHOUGH THE DUST HAS NOT SETTLED, BETTING REMAINS IN FAVOR OF THE NF TRYING TO SUSTAIN ITS MOMENTUM BY CALLING EARLY NATIONWIDE GENERAL ELECTIONS, POSSIBLY AS EARLY AS APRIL (SOME OBSERVERS SAY THAT MAY WOULD NOT BE PROPITIOUS IN VIEW OF BITTER MEMORIES OF THE VITUPERATIVE MAY, 1969, ELECTIONS AND SUBSEQUENT RACE RIOTS). PARLIAMENT IS SCHEDULED TO BE IN SESSION MARCH 20 - APRIL 7 AND WE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF IT WAS DISSOLVED AT THE CONCLUSION OF ITS BUSINESS AND ELECTIONS HELD LATER IN THE MONTH.
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